The Collected Letters of W. B. Yeats. Vol. III, 1901–1904. Edited by JOHN KELLY and RONALD SCHUCHARD. Pp. liv+782. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994. £35.

After an interval of eight years, the first volume of Yeats's complete correspondence is now followed by Volume III, which maintains the outstandingly high standards of scholarship of its predecessor. A detailed chronology of Yeats's life, compact but authoritative essays on the leading personalities he knew and the institutions with which he associated, together with an exhaustive index, provide valuable help to the reader. What gives this edition its distinctive character, however, is the annotation. The footnotes are comprehensive but not intrusive, meticulous but not pedantic. Above all, they are entertaining, often redeeming a lack-lustre letter with a sparkle of wit or an amusing anecdote. Drawing on a surely unparalleled knowledge of the literary milieu of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Ireland, they enrich considerably our grasp of the culture of this period.

By contrast, the familiar view of Yeats's own development in these years is altered little by this volume of his letters (almost all the most interesting correspondence has already appeared in Wade's edition, or in *Uncollected Prose*). The mystic of the 1890s, who rejected all traces of 'externality' in art and life, lingers on: Yeats intervenes in internal dissensions in the Order of the Golden Dawn; is inspired by Gordon Craig's innovative, non-naturalistic staging effects; and pursues a hieratic solemnity in poetry through his experiments with Florence Farr and Arnold Dolmetsch in chanting verse to the psaltery. But increasing absorption in theatre business leads to Yeats's radical rejection of the 'effeminate' ethereality of his early poetry. He gains experience as an orator on a punishing lecture tour of North America, and as a controversialist in the battles to defend the Irish Literary Theatre and Irish National Theatre Society against moralistic or Nationalist censorship; a hard-headed resoluteness likewise informs his negotiations with publishers. He remarks memorably to John Quinn: 'I am often driven to speak about things that I would keep silent on were it not that it is necessary in a country like Ireland to be continually asserting one's freedom if one is not to lose it altogether.' And this volume does indeed contain impressive, impassioned defences of freedom: the freedom of the artist not to write propaganda, the freedom of a colonized nation, upheld at a dinner party given by advocates of Imperialism at its most fatuous.

Reading Nietzsche confirms Yeats's élitist views: in his mythological plays he tries to 're-create an heroical ideal in manhood'; in letters to the press, inspired by *Götzendämmerung*, Yeats takes his own hammer to the idols of Nationalist bigotry. Although Yeats might claim not to find Nietzsche 'apart from certain stray petulances incompatable [*sic*] with the kind of socialism I learned from William Morris', his earlier aristocratic *hauteurs* ('I have always felt that my mission in Ireland is to serve taste rather than any definite propoganda [*sic*]') undoubtedly become more pronounced. Maud Gonne's marriage to Major John MacBride only adds to Yeats's contempt for what he saw as Catholic and Nationalist philistinism. In a desperate attempt to forestall the wedding, Yeats writes: 'you are going to marry one of the people. . . . I appeal, I whose hands were placed in yours by eternal hands, to come back to your self. To take up again the proud solitary haughty life which made [you] seem like one of the golden gods.' Perhaps fittingly, given Yeats's sense of tragic decorum, the drama of his relationship with Maud Gonne largely takes place offstage; there are tantalizingly few letters to her in this bulky volume, and Yeats's feelings for her after her marriage find expression only in occasional letters to the sympathetically maternal Lady Gregory. Indeed, although Yeats clearly led an extremely gregarious existence, these largely business-like letters betray few intimate glimpses of the man behind the masks.

Instead we gain an impression of the bizarre incongruity of Yeats's activities in these transitionary years. Which politician would take seriously a woman convinced that the British reverses in the Boer War were due to black magic and another who 'felt herself

bombarded with a hostile force by a statue in the British Museum'? Which occultist could lecture to a packed audience of Irish Americans on Robert Emmet? It is one of the delights of this edition that in their annotation the editors themselves enter into the spirit of Yeats's idiosyncrasies.

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Running to Paradise: Yeats's Poetic Art. By M. L. ROSENTHAL. Pp. x+362. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994. £12·50.

M. L. Rosenthal's description of *Running to Paradise* as 'an essay in evaluative poetic criticism' sets his study in a tradition of ambitious critical works on Yeats which, in a time of increasing scholarly precision with its inevitable narrowing of focus, does need to be maintained. If Rosenthal's study is not in all respects so successful as some of its predecessors (like Harold Bloom's *Yeats* (1970), Richard Ellmann's *The Identity of Yeats* (1954), T. R. Henn's *The Lonely Tower* (1950), or even Louis MacNeice's *The Poetry of W. B. Yeats* (1941)), it possesses nevertheless distinctive strengths which make it a useful and thought-provoking contribution to critical debate. Rosenthal's project is not limited by polemical argument, theoretical imperatives, or biographical speculation; instead, the intention to provide a reading of Yeats's career with careful attention to the kinds of development and success to be found in the poems themselves is followed through scrupulously. While the resultant book is, in a way, offputtingly devoid of argument, it is also a consistently lucid and engaging performance, whose ideas and observations can prompt fruitful disagreement.

The poetic art of Rosenthal's subtitle is one which Yeats develops in both poems and plays; among the study's most useful features is its insistence on the need to consider Yeats's drama alongside the poetry, and the chapters devoted to the Cuchulain cycle and to the plays of the 1930s are worthwhile explorations of the significance of this material in the poet's career. It is arguable that Rosenthal spends rather too much time on plot summary, especially when dealing with Yeats's earlier plays; however, the emphasis upon *The Words upon the Window-Pane*, for example, in preparing for the critical discussion of Yeats's poetry of the mid- to late 1930s seems both fresh and rewarding.

A drawback of Rosenthal's approach to Yeats's writing is the occasional tendency to introduce extremely familiar material at undue length; along with this, there is too often an episodic effect as the critic takes stock of poem after poem with either perfunctory or slightly too obvious remarks. Two chapters inspect Yeats's 'Poetry of transition' (in 1910–14 and 1914–19), but the problematic pervasiveness of Yeatsian 'transition' is not considered here, while the nuts and bolts of stylistic analysis are sometimes overlooked in the larger (and, perhaps, blander) perspectives of evaluation. Rosenthal's ability to bring formal attention to bear on matters such as stanza form is always illuminating, though it is not employed as often as it might be, and the reader is sometimes left wishing for more in the way of close formal observation. The book's critical idiom, too, can be subject to some disarming fluctuations, as when we are told that 'Sailing to Byzantium' is 'an audio-visual mural in four panels', or that 1927 was 'a pre-astronaut year'; similarly, the statement that, in 'Byzantium', 'The vision of immortality at the expense of life is a tragic one . . . but strangely vital at the same time' seems a mixture of the perceptive and the infelicitous.

Complaints like these, however, do not really reflect the overall coherence of Rosenthal's approach, or its areas of sustained success. Rosenthal has already insisted on the significance of sequence and arrangement among twentieth-century poets (in *The Modern Poetic Sequence: The Genius of Modern Poetry* (1983)), and *Running to Paradise* makes much of Yeats's habits of both connection and juxtaposition. Rosenthal

